Despite All of My Virtue

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Despite All of My Virtue

by air_of_the_Waterfall

Summary

A companion piece to Condescend and Never Lend A Hand, and will probably not make sense as a standalone. An alternate ending in which Jack's bullet doesn't miss Hannibal, but justice doesn't feel as good as he anticipated.

Notes

PLEASE heed the warnings, as this is probably going to hurt. I don't know why I did this to myself, but I cried writing it. The title is from "The Garden" by Flower Face.

“I. Love. Him.”

Will’s words plucked open Jack’s spine, unzipping tense flesh and unraveling him like a knitted sweater. They tapped each vertebrae with chilled, certain fingers, and shocks of rage crumbled Jack’s walls of reason. All these years, he had been chasing a lost cause. He’d been made a fool of by Hannibal Lecter too many times. He swung his gun at the unflappable monster and fired, the shot resounding like a bomb in the indoor space.

Weight barreled into Jack’s side, and his back and skull crunched against the floor hard enough to knock the air out of him. Nausea hit him in receding waves, but after the shock wore off, he was aware of Will’s fists pummeling his face and blood gushing. It tasted of betrayal.

This went on for only a moment before Will stumbled and paused, painted red and shaking with righteous adrenaline of his own. Jack’s head swam and his vision blurred in and out, but he managed to cough up a few breaths and take stock of the moment. Will perched on Jack’s chest, frozen and staring across the room, before leaping up and bolting in that direction with a choked sound.

Jack sat upright and lunged with a furious roar, snatching Will’s ankle before Will kicked him in the face and stumbled back to his feet. Reeling, Jack laid still for another few moments, sputtering and licking his teeth under a broken nose. An unpleasant sucking and gurgling noise dragged its way around the room.

“Hannibal…” Will sounded *destroyed* , ragged and torn. “Han… Hannibal…”

Jack finally pushed himself up on one arm, then blinked as stillness descended.

Lecter lay prone on the ground, life gushing from a hollow in his sternum as he stared at nothing and took short, noisy breaths. His head lolled slowly back and forth as if searching for something as Will cradled him against his lap, stroking his hair.

“Hannibal… Hannibal, Hannibal… Ha…” Will pleaded before a hiccup cut him off, melting into a long, stilted wail that wasn’t quite a scream.

The noise ground into Jack’s ears, skull, and chest like metal shrieking against porcelain, and more intense chills began to reverberate up and down his body. Before he could process it, he was doubling over against the floor and vomiting in a black haze of semi-consciousness.

Jack had killed people before. When you’d been in the field as long as he, it was inevitable that self-defense had to cross that line. Ridding the world of Lecter was the right thing to do, but Will’s taunts about self-defense, justice, and purpose hovered fresh in his mind. He forced himself to look back at the two, caught between congealing grief and boiling relief that the nightmare was over.

Will was sobbing, now, clutching Hannibal as much as he could without moving him and causing further pain. Eventually, he sank to the ground and laid beside him, forehead pressed

to Hannibal's as he cradled his increasingly pale face.

"I'm so sorry, baby," he quavered. "I was too slow. I… I… *Hannibal* …"

He looked once more like the frail, panicked profiler who could have collapsed at a crime scene with too much breeze. The suave, hedonistic little demon Jack had just met vanished as quickly as he seemed to appear. To make things worse, Jack saw himself. Will looked like Jack often felt, cocooned beneath the blankets on Bella's side of the bed for more harrowing nights than he'd ever admit.

Though he couldn't see it, the house and the world were wrenching apart, cracking the slender ribs of Earth's crust to release great gouts of magma and aching ash. Jack had killed people, yes, but now he had taken *everything* from someone he claimed to care about. With a burning throat, he opened his mouth as if to reason with himself, anger flickering to life once again. Lecter deserved it.

And yet, Jack felt no victory.

He dragged himself to his feet and retrieved the gun from where Will threw it, then simply stood in the doorway to watch Lec… Hannibal take his last breaths. Jack owed him a bit of their old camaraderie at this moment, summoning back the respect he'd once had for the brilliant doctor, the charismatic chef, and the loyal friend. The serial killer Jack had spent decades chasing was gone, no longer able to bite with his frail gasping mouth, and all that remained was the dying man Will Graham loved.

Hannibal managed to focus on his partner's face for a moment, reaching up to play with his curls. Will leaned into the touch automatically while sobbing with huge, desperate eyes. Neither were bargaining or scrambling for solutions, knowing that it was too late and instead choosing to preserve whatever they had a final time.

"Thank you," Will whispered.

For a second, Jack thought he was talking to him. Jack allowed himself to summon up a shred of hope that maybe, just *maybe* he hadn't broken Will. Maybe he really had freed him…

Will only clung to Hannibal tighter, seeming to have forgotten Jack entirely.

"Thank you, Hannibal. Thank you for showing me what living is. I didn't thank you enough for anything…" The words were barely breaking through the tears now. "I was grumpy too many mornings when you brought me breakfast. I didn't thank you. Fuck, I'm rude. I… I just need you to hear that I don't regret anything, baby. Leave all your lingering doubts here with me, and I'll burn them before I come and find you, okay? We'll have a new home forever, and they'll never find us. It'll be just you and me and that's where we'll belong."

Ever so carefully, he shifted Hannibal to lay against Will's chest so he could rub his back. There was no exit wound, so the bullet must have still been gnawing on his lung. Hannibal winced, boneless against Will and drenching him in ever-weakening blood. Will didn't seem to mind, kissing all over his face and murmuring how much he loved him. Hannibal looked

up into his face with gentle eyes that sharpened long enough to exhale heavily and nuzzle Will's chest. The love in return seemed to burst between them.

"Will. Stay. *Please* stay."

"I'm not going anywhere, Han. I've got you."

Hannibal began to cry. "Stay *here. Don't*…"

Will's brow furrowed. Hannibal trembled violently and looked up at him with frantic eyes that made Will cry anew.

"H-Han…"

Hannibal seemed frustrated yet resigned, finally tearing his gaze from Will to look at Jack. This stunned Jack out of the hazy, disbelieving stupor that had thus far coloured the evening. Hannibal's voice, the last time it came, was shockingly steady.

"Please don't let him follow me."

Will stammered, "Wh– Hannibal! Don't go. You can't. I need you. I need you, I need you, I need you…"

He repeated this like it was CPR, and Jack just stood there frozen and defeated with his mouth agape. Hannibal burrowed securely into Will again before breathing deeply, dragging out the moment before he finally fell still and silent. The storm settled, a tsunami passed after consuming a city in its wake. Will's tears streamed from his unblinking eyes like rain, and he rocked Hannibal's limp body back and forth while continuing to kiss his face.

"There you go, honey," he whispered. "You're okay now."

A few long minutes passed as Will's breathing evened out into a slow yet agonized rhythm, never letting Hannibal go all the while. He looked like a lifeless machine that's lost its engine, left with nothing but a backup generator doomed to break. Finally, he slowly turned his head to fix unreadable eyes on Jack. Only then did Jack remember that his own body was present in the room.

Will's voice held no inflection, eyes flat like the shine of a blade. He was now the most dangerous man alive.

"You really should have been long gone by now, Jack."

Some insane part of Jack wanted to apologize, but he didn't. Instead, he forced his voice not to come out in a croak. "What are you going to do now?"

"I'm going with him."

Jack considered this, flexing his fingers around the still-warm gun that he held at his side. It was nothing but metal as Lecter was nothing but flesh, indifferent to the deed it had done.

“I can’t let you kill yourself, Will. Besides, he wanted you to live.”

Now, Will exploded, but he still didn’t stand up. “You’re still trying to *fucking* save me!” he bellowed. “I’m a *bad person* , Jack. I’m just as bad as Hannibal if not worse. No, I’m worse. I committed atrocities of my own *and* I shamelessly enabled him! If you want your justice, then *fucking take it* ! You can’t leave the job half done. You’ve fucking shot me before. Or are you desperate to hang onto the one shred of purpose your life still has? I’m not your *project* , Jack!”

His voice cracked loudly at the end, his entire body trembling and filled with fire.

Jack took a deep, silent breath, and all that washed over him was a deep tide of calm. Slowly, he raised his arm from his side, and Will clung to Hannibal with tightly closed eyes while whispering something about seeing him soon and pleas for forgiveness.

Jack set the gun on a nearby table with a quiet, thunderous click, keeping mournful eye contact with Will the whole time. Then, he turned his back and wandered into the starlit night. The ocean whispered against glowing white sand, and he took a deep breath that didn’t fulfill him. In the brief minutes he spent starting his car and backing out onto the road, he did not hear another gunshot.

. . .

No longer trembling, sticky and warm with blood and tears, Will delicately traced his fingers over Hannibal’s unmoving chest. He studied the bullet wound, absently pulling his own fingers to his mouth to clean them. The agony within him sat empty and cold, colder than when he’d been alone in the world *before* , echoing a feeble attempt at breath like the fragile walls of a conch. He pressed a featherlight kiss to his beloved’s slack mouth, beginning to conjure up images of an exquisite final tableau.

Hannibal’s heart was salvageable.

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